

# National PTA in Ed Daily Article on Family Engagement Framework

Education Daily reported today on a draft of a family engagement framework that the US Department of Education worked on last week. National PTA was positioned positively and as a thought leader on family engagement in the article below. Please share among members and contact National PTA's Government Affairs team if you have any questions about the framework. Thanks!

## ED shares draft family engagement framework

**By Tricia Offutt**

A crowd of about 80, including family engagement advocates, practitioners, Education Secretary Arne Duncan and Education Department staff, pondered a draft version of a federal capacity building framework for family engagement during a meeting last week at Stanton Elementary. Stanton is a Title I school located in one of D.C.'s poorest neighborhoods.

School staff and parents explained how family engagement and a partnership with the Flamboyan Foundation transformed the school. The school's efforts earned kudos from Harvard researcher Karen Mapp who said Stanton reflects what the framework looks like in action.

"This [framework] gives us a scaffold that sets a direction, tone and focus for the work of family engagement not only in the department but we're hoping for the field at large," Mapp said.

Michael Robbins, ED's senior advisor for nonprofit partnerships, said Stanton's experience also shows the framework holds promise to stem the tide of teacher burnout and turnover in high-stress school reform settings.

In the coming months, the Education Department will continue to revise the framework and gather feedback, especially from state Title I directors who play a critical role in advising districts about parent involvement, said Jim Shelton, head of ED's Office of Innovation and Improvement.

"We would like to have it finalized by the end of the first quarter [in 2013], and work should start flowing from it shortly after," Shelton said in an interview with *Education Daily*®. The framework's goal is to set a high bar not to prescribe what models best fit local needs, he explained.

## On the horizon

During the event, top ED officials indicated willingness within the Title I office to work creatively to identify current resources and how to use those to advance family engagement, said Jacques Chevalier, senior education policy strategist for National PTA.

Potential funding pockets include the Title I parent involvement set-aside, which ED would like to see doubled through ESEA reauthorization; Investing in Innovation, and Race to the Top district grants, Promise Neighborhoods, and School Improvement Grants, Shelton said.

In the next few months, Shelton said OII will work to:

- Revise the framework as needed.
- Identify effective family engagement models in the field.

- Craft action steps; for example, Mapp will work with ED program officers to gather ideas for how they can apply the framework within their areas.

Brenda Girton-Mitchell, director of ED's Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, said her office intends to be "one of the voices on the inside" to make sure family engagement and the framework gets the attention deserved. "Without making false promises, just know it's not going to be taken lightly," she said.

### **Advocates approve**

"I think family engagement has been so mis-guided in the past, but not on purpose," said Maria Paredes, senior program associate for WestEd and developer of the Academic Parent-Teacher Team model that Stanton uses along with the Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project. "The framework definitely is much more with the times and the intention of student outcomes."

Those in the field also see the framework as a significant move by the federal government.

"We see this as a new commitment. That's why we're so thrilled," said National PTA President Betsy Landers. "We really are looking forward to seeing what is yet to come and eager to hold Secretary Duncan to his words at the event that we hold him accountable."

The National Family, School, and Community Engagement Working Group also gave its stamp of approval to the framework, which was developed by Mapp in close collaboration with ED's Anna Hinton and Monique Toussaint.

However, meeting participants are anxious for more details and decisive federal investments.

For example, Arnold Fege with Public Education Network said he likes the framework so well that he thinks it should become a requirement under new and existing federal competitive grants.

Quickly finalizing the framework is essential given the hit that family engagement capacity building took when the federal Parental Information and Resource Center grant program was defunded, said Vito Borrello, president of Every Person Influences Children and a former PIRC director. Those now scattered experts and resources, "won't come back in a snap," he said.

However, the framework brings hope to the field, Borrello and Fege said. "This is where it begins. If you don't have a framework, then all the other work is misguided," Borrello said.

He and others said Duncan's actions and words were heartening alongside the presence of 10 ED staff members. Duncan stayed for 90 minutes of the two-hour meeting, moderated a panel discussion, and told attendees that family engagement tops his list of areas where the ED needs to improve.

Despite the backdrop of a stalled ESEA reauthorization and the uncertainty of the fiscal cliff, there remain plenty of options for ED, Chevalier said. For example, ED could use some national activity funds for school improvement toward family engagement capacity building, and no legislation is required to appoint a senior advisor for family engagement, she added.

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